

Navigating Challenging Waters

A Guide for Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Educators in PreK-12

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Why This Guide?

Culturally relevant and sustaining education (CRSE) is that which “ensures equity for all students and seeks to eliminate systemic institutional racial and cultural barriers that inhibit the success of all students...particularly those who have been historically underrepresented.”¹ Here in Pennsylvania, Chapter 49 of the Pennsylvania School Code, revised in November 2022, mandates culturally relevant and sustaining education in teacher preparation and K-12 in-service teacher professional development. The Pennsylvania Department of Education requires the use of a specific framework for Cultural Awareness in teacher preparation; however, K-12 schools and districts have complete discretion as to how they meet the mandate of Chapter 49. Consequently, PreK-12 teachers may receive little to no support in their desire or effort to be culturally relevant and sustaining educators. Furthermore, pre-service teachers, their mentor teachers in the field, and other educators are confronted with persistent challenges that make enacting CRSE difficult in even the most supportive school contexts. This guide was created as a resource for PreK-12 educators who care about meeting the needs of each of their learners and strive to embody CRSE, while navigating issues that make this difficult.

This guide is organized into three sections, aligning with three major challenges PreK-12 educators may face when implementing CRSE: 1) the current divisive sociopolitical climate, 2) the prevalence of scripted curricular materials, and 3) the experience of having a highly homogeneous student population. Each section contains a description of the challenge, strategies for navigating it, and suggested resources; the latter two sections also showcase how the suggested strategies align with the Danielson Framework. The guide can be used in its entirety, or readers may use only the sections applicable to the challenges they face.

Contributors

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The content of this guide reflects the views of its authors and not necessarily those of their affiliated institutions. To pose questions or offer feedback on this guide, please contact crse@temple.edu.

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¹ Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2022). Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education (CR-SE) Program Framework Guidelines. <https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/education/documents/educators/certification-preparation-programs/framework-guidelines-and-rubrics/culturally-relevant%20and%20sustaining%20education%20program%20framework%20guidelines.pdf>

CRSE in the Current Climate

Description of the Challenge

The United States has experienced a dramatic return toward educational policies that engender harm based on identity, citizenship, and beliefs. This shift has happened incredibly quickly, and while that timeline is unprecedented, the idea of backward motion is not without precedent. History repeatedly demonstrates that positive change can come after enormous steps backward (this, of course, is not to say that any step backwards is a good thing). The timeline below captures some of the events since 2017 that have led us to the current moment.





Timeline of Federal Actions Related to Educational Equity

2017

Rescinding Obama-Era Guidance on Race in Admissions

The Trump administration rolled back guidance that encouraged colleges to consider race in admissions to promote diversity, marking a retreat from affirmative action policies.

Historical Parallel:

The Supreme Court's 2003 Grutter v. Bollinger decision upheld race-conscious admissions, but similar efforts to limit affirmative action date back to Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978).

2020

Executive Order Against Anti-Racism Training

Trump signed an order banning federal funding for diversity and anti-racism training, labeling it as "divisive" and "un-American."

Historical Parallel:

Similar backlash occurred after the Civil Rights Movement, when calls for multicultural education and ethnic studies programs were met with resistance in the 1970s.

2017

Appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education

DeVos prioritized school choice and private school vouchers while downplaying support for public education. She also rolled back protections for marginalized students.

Historical Parallel:

The Reagan administration's 1980s push for vouchers and school choice marked a similar ideological shift away from public education.

2025

Expansion of The Anti-CRT and DEI Bans

Trump strengthens bans on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and Critical Race Theory (CRT) in schools and universities, threatening federal funding for institutions that teach race-conscious history.

Historical Parallel:

The backlash to Reconstruction (1865-1877), when laws ensuring Black civil rights were overturned and replaced with segregationist Jim Crow policies.

2018

School Safety Commission and The Repeal of Discipline Reform

DeVos's commission on school safety rescinded Obama-era policies aimed at reducing racial disparities in school discipline, increasing the likelihood of harsher punishment for students of color.

Historical Parallel:

The expansion of "zero tolerance" policies in the 1990s fueled the school-to-prison pipeline, disproportionately impacting Black and brown students.

Though not exhaustive, these examples highlight how educational progress in the U.S. has often been met with fierce resistance, requiring persistent activism and policy shifts to correct course. Progress and pushback are often “normal,” even if unwelcome and painful parts of the change cycle. While Trump’s second term represents a significant setback, history suggests that steps forward can - and consistently do - follow. However, those steps are not taken by embracing stagnation. As such, we offer potential action opportunities that consider our current environment, which is characterized by pushback against progressive educational movements. The current political climate in education (and beyond), succinctly, is one that is working to undermine equity, diversity, and public education in ways that can have long-term consequences for marginalized communities. In the strategies below, one key element we encourage is the avoidance of anticipatory obedience. In other words, do not “give in” or work to neutralize a situation prior to being asked or otherwise compelled to do so.

Strategies To Respond To This Challenge

The strategies below have some alignment with Danielson’s Domain 4, which emphasizes professional judgment, continuous reflection, and advocacy for students and equitable practices. In the face of shifting policies and heightened political scrutiny around CRSE and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), these actions reflect a deep commitment to ethical practice, educator well-being, and student-centered work. They demonstrate how educators can remain grounded in their values, navigate challenges with resilience, and continue advocating for inclusive, high-quality, and equitable education for all learners.

1. Do Not Engage in Anticipatory Obedience

Trust your professional expertise and values.

- Don’t preemptively censor curriculum, language, or student support out of fear; rely on your training and ethical commitments to guide your choices.

Build collective strength before compromising.

- Consult with trusted colleagues or professional organizations before making changes that could undermine equity or inclusion; don’t act alone under pressure that hasn’t yet materialized.

Don’t let misinformation or a lack of information be a reason you obey in advance.

Resources

[Democracy Now: Do Not Obey in Advance](#)

This is an interview with Yale historian and author Timothy Snyder, an expert on authoritarianism, about how corporate America has responded to Donald Trump’s reelection.

[Counter Narrate: CUNY Academic Commons](#)

This Counter Narrate homepage was launched alongside the publication of the February 2025 essay “Resist Anticipatory Obedience” by CUNY faculty members Elizabeth Bishop and Michelle Fine. At the time of its publication, the group also launched an archive for educators and community members entitled “Public Offering: Archive of Resistance and Subversion (POARS).”

2. Go To The Source

Start by identifying trusted sources for news.

- Outlets like the Associated Press, NPR, and Politico offer fact-checked, nonpartisan reporting (see additional resources below).

Review more than one news source before forming an opinion on a topic.

- Comparing coverage helps you spot bias, avoid misinformation, and better understand the full context of an issue.



Resources

Learning for Justice: Digital Literacy Framework

- The Learning for Justice Digital Literacy Framework offers seven key areas in which students need support developing digital and civic literacy skills.

AllSides: Media Bias

- AllSides empowers you to understand the role media bias plays in the news and information you consume. The AllSides Media Bias Ratings™ and AllSides Media Bias Chart™ help make news bias transparent
- See also: [Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart](#)

Wooden Shoe Bookstore

- Founded in 1976, the Wooden Shoe is an all volunteer, collectively-run, anarchist bookstore. They also identify as an infoshop, meaning that they serve as a space for people to gather, learn, and find out more about like-minded activities happening in their communities.

3. Focus On The Work

Don't get caught up in the language.

- The right's efforts to focus on key terms like “woke” and “critical race theory” are deliberate efforts to distract from approaches to teaching that may actually meet the needs of diverse populations (Emdin, 2021).

Rather than feed into that language, focus on the concepts, not the buzzwords.

- Instead of “cultural capital,” talk about how you value and utilize the unique knowledge and skills students bring to the classroom.
- Instead of “culturally responsive,” you can say you make learning relevant to students' lives and experiences.
- Instead of “equity,” talk about how you ensure that all students have opportunities to learn and succeed.

"The resources in this series offer strategies to help us engage as a broader community across our differences and build networks to foster resilience and take action to resist hate and bias."

- Instead of “culturally diverse teaching strategies”, you can talk about how you use a variety of teaching methods to reach all learners.

Explain that the goal is to prepare citizens for a democracy in which all of their families' and extended families' needs are met and where they experience physical and psychological safety.

Resources

Critical Race Theory Debate Has Nothing To Do With Education, Professor Argues

- This 2021 article by Elizabeth Dohms-Harter from Wisconsin Public Radio explains why the term critical race theory has become weaponized as a “political ploy.”

Learning for Justice: Resisting Hate in Education

- The resources in this series offer strategies to help us engage as a broader community across our differences and build networks to foster resilience and take action to resist hate and bias.

AFT: Protecting Our Students

- What you need to know about the rights of immigrants, the threat of deportation, and what we as educators can do about it.

Learning for Justice: Teaching as Activism, Teaching as Care

- This article by Jamilah Pitts talks about the spectrum of how teachers can be activists.
- See also: [Rethinking Schools: Activism is Good Teaching](#)



4. Protect Your Peace/Go Underground

Engage in an appropriate level of self-care so that you are never really "done."

- Sustainable advocacy requires rest, reflection, and boundaries; burnout benefits those working against equity. Self-care could include:
 - Walking/walking meditation
 - Diet
 - Exercise
 - Mental health
 - Journaling to document experience.
 - Communities for support, like reading circles.

Be in community with like-minded people.

- Staying connected with others who share your values helps you feel supported, grounded, and reminded you're not alone.

Know when to stop consuming news; set limits for yourself.

- Constant exposure can be overwhelming.
- Take breaks to maintain clarity and preserve your capacity to act thoughtfully.

Resources

[How to Keep Up with the News Without Getting Overwhelmed \(Harvard Business Review\)](#)

- Studies suggest that increased exposure to news, whether through traditional media or social media platforms, can negatively impact mental health. In other words, more news correlates with higher anxiety. But the answer is not to check out altogether.

[Want to Really Make America Great Again? Stop Reading the News \(Medium\)](#)

- This article by Ryan Holiday, author of *Trust me, I'm Lying*, talks about the power of media manipulation and the cable news cycle.

[Habesha Health: Trauma Informed Self-Care \(Habesha Health\)](#)

- This article explains the trauma-informed approach to self-care.
- "Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."
- See also: [Trauma-Informed Self-Care for Educators](#)

[Black Women Mothering & Daughtering During a Dual Pandemic](#)

- The contributors of this volume share with the scholarly community how they have learned to strive, resist, adapt, and re-conceptualize Black women's mental health and labor during the dual pandemics of white supremacy and COVID-19.

Additional Resource

[Liberatory practices to resist school-based oppression](#)



Scripted Curricula

Description of the Challenge

Many school districts have implemented curricular resources such as Ready Math or HMH in the hopes that the curriculum will be standardized, test scores will rise, and teachers will have a resource to use when working with their students. While this may be beneficial to school districts in some ways, it may also be detrimental for the learning of students who don't see any representations of themselves in the curriculum or resources that have no scaffolds for specific populations of learners. Many of these curricular kits do not attend to culturally relevant pedagogy and severely limit a teacher's agency, creativity, and authoring. School districts that mandate implementing these scripted curricula should provide training for teachers in not only the delivery of the curricula, but also how to adapt the curricula for the specific learners in the teachers' classrooms. Challenges include²:

- Curriculum is implemented for a short time before being cast aside for something new, or, on the other hand, it is kept – though ineffective – due to monetary investments
- The potential for teachers to dismiss culturally relevant and sustaining practices if they are not part of the district's chosen scripted curricula program.
- Limits to teacher agency, creativity, and insight
- Modifications that are often needed to ensure engagement, relevance, and accessibility due to:
 - Inappropriate materials in that they are not culturally relevant or responsive
 - A lack of resources for both struggling learners and learners who excel
 - The absence of principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)



Want to read more about how scripted curriculum can be seen as curricular punishment and what teachers can do in their school/district? Consider:

Milner, H. R. (2025). Curriculum Punishment in Teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 76(2), 136–145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871241286066>

²Fitz, J.A. & Nikolaidis, A.C. (2019). A democratic critique of scripted curriculum, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(2), 195-213. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00220272.2019.1661524>

Strategies to Respond to this Challenge

Curricular Goal 1

Build student self-efficacy by consistently ensuring that they see themselves in the curriculum and normalize the multicultural identities in our country depicting humans in a range of roles (Danielson 1b, 4c, 4e).

Questions to consider

- Who is in my classroom? Do I have neurodivergent, emerging bilingual, urban, rural, suburban, low income/working class, middle class and/or affluent families, transgender/gender fluid, immigrant, first generation American, diverse spiritual traditions represented?
- What information is distorted and can lead to misconceptions about social identity groups (including students' identity groups) represented in/missing from this lesson?
- Are my students' cultural identities and communities represented in this lesson/unit? *cultural= all social identity groups
- How can I introduce identities that are excluded that my students have little exposure to in their communities?

Adaptations

Supplement curricular materials with additional resources that best represent your students and allow them to see a diverse array of identities. For example:

- Support your students in seeing excellence across multicultural identities. In all subjects, ensure you are highlighting the many important contributions of people from varied identities.
- Consider including community members who hold local history and people who students identify as important.

Curricular Goal 2

Utilize your deep knowledge of your students and the school community to ensure that your instruction is meeting students where they are and supporting them with instruction and examples that are relevant to their lives (Danielson 1b, 1c, 1e, 3a, 3c, 3d, 4c).

Questions to consider

- What are my students' past educational experiences?
- What is valued in their homes, communities, and this school?
- Have my students been exposed to the content in this lesson/unit?

- How can I help my students see why the learning/concepts are relevant to the real world/social issues that impact their lives?

Adaptations

Utilize interest inventories, observation, and family surveys to deeply learn about who your students are and what their communities value. For example:

- When teaching how to write persuasive letters, allow students to choose a topic they are passionate about to write a real letter to an important stakeholder. This may look like advocating for ways to recycle cafeteria waste or to include coding as an afterschool club. This can also be extended to community concerns such as writing letters to city council or the mayor about trash pick up in their neighborhood. Develop students' research skills by asking them to walk around their community and decide for themselves what is a problem and determine together to whom they should write or create a video message.
- A Geometry lesson on patterns can be extended to incorporate interviews of older family members to find out about heritage and culture (foods, words, traditions, joys and challenges, etc.). Allow students to make patterns incorporating their cultural heritage with supplies to add color and texture.

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"Are my students' cultural identities and communities represented in this lesson/unit?"



Curricular Goal 3

Integrate play and project-based learning to engage learners in active learning. Young learners thrive through play and active learning. It enhances engagement and deepens understanding (Danielson 2, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3e).

Questions to consider

- What do I know about the ways in which my students learn best?
- Do these curricular materials match what I know about student learning and development?
- Will my students be engaged with these instructional materials?
- Am I using a variety of assessment strategies and activities to engage students and allow them to demonstrate learning?

Adaptations

Supplement the scripted curriculum with additional activities and assessments that meet your students' needs and what you know about them as engaged learners. For example:

- Adapt an upper elementary/middle school lesson about historical events such as WWII. Revise it into a play that engages learners as actors (countries, people). Use contemporary language to hold their attention and have fun.
- Incorporate social groups not represented in the materials; even simply wondering aloud about this will stimulate students' thinking. Give them websites/books from the school or local library to find out more and bring back to class.

Curricular Goal 4

Enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of diverse identity groups in order to prepare students for citizenship in a democracy where we support others and advocate for equity (Danielson 3b, 3c, and 4f).

Questions to consider

- What contrasting perspectives might people of diverse identity groups (race, disability, geography, etc.) have about this text/concept?
- What curricular materials, texts, and resources can I add to provide diverse representation in the curriculum?
- How can I help students think critically and make decisions about social issues that affect their lives and the lives of others?
- How can I prepare students to advocate for change for themselves and others when they notice/discover inequities?

Adaptations

Support students in becoming critical consumers of information, considering who/what is privileged, and support students in becoming advocates for equitable societal changes. For example:

- Choose a historical topic covered in the curriculum and help students become critical consumers of the topic by identifying the perspective that the event privileges and what perspectives are ignored. Encourage research on other perspectives, utilizing primary sources, if possible.
- Use non-fiction texts to teach about activists who have made a difference in students' communities, our country and/or the world.



Resources

This is an abbreviated list of resources that cover a range of topics, identity groups, and strategies. Websites and articles also include links to other sites.

Universal Design for Learning

CAST. Resources for removing barriers to learning. Includes courses, books, tips, digital tools and the opportunity to become CAST UDL credentialed.

- [CAST | Until learning has no limits.](#)
 - [Courses: CAST](#)

The Center for Universal Design in education. Many excellent resources for inclusive learning.

- [Overview | DO-IT](#)
- [Applications of Universal Design in Primary and Secondary Education | DO-IT](#)

Various articles on PK-12 UDL (please download files for future access).

- [Universal Design for Learning Pk-12 Articles](#)

Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) Universal Design Resources. Includes additional information on UDL in the classroom.

- [PaTTAN Evidence Based Practices - UDL](#)

Iris Center Learning Modules on UDL- Instruction on how to design learning materials that challenge all students.

- [IrisModulesUDL](#)

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"What contrasting perspectives might people of diverse identity groups have about this text/concept?"

Adaptive Teaching

Research article with findings from the adaptive teaching inventory developed to promote and study adaptive teaching.

- [Challenging Scripted Curricula With Adaptive Teaching - Margaret Vaughn, Seth A. Parsons, Melissa A. Gallagher, 2022](#)

Learning resources from the University of Florida Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center that includes information and tools for supporting students with disabilities in achieving college and career readiness by preparing educators and leaders to implement evidence based practices.

- [CEEDAR Center Learning Resources](#)

Just Right Reader provides resources on the science of reading decodables in English and Spanish.

- [Free Decodables in English and Spanish](#)



Scripted Curricula Adaptation Strategies

Teachers modify scripted curricula regularly, whether consciously or unconsciously, as we all must scaffold and differentiate for our students' varied academic/cognitive learning needs. Integrating culturally relevant or responsive concepts is one way we can modify throughout the year in order to normalize critical thinking and the mindset and behaviors we often espouse as American ideals.

Identifies practical strategies for adapting and building diversity in scripted ELA curriculum.

- [5 Strategies for Diversifying and Adapting Scripted ELA Curriculum - Building Book Love](#)

Coordinated by Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change, this resource includes information and a variety of teaching materials across grades and subjects that address the teaching of people's history.

- [Zinned Project](#)

A non-profit publisher and advocacy organization with resources on social justice and activism.

- [Rethinking Schools](#)

Teaching for Change provides a variety of books involving social justice for children and adults.

- [Book Reviews by Themes - Social Justice Books](#)

A book that identifies and discusses the importance, principles, and guidelines of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood programs.

- [Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8, 4th ed.](#)

A link to a book with information regarding Anti-Bias Education, especially for young children, including guidelines, examples, and case studies.

- [ABE Derman Sparks](#)

A comprehensive resource with information including magazines, podcasts, educator resources, film kits, lesson plans, and teaching strategies for social justice and social emotional learning.

- [Educator Resources | Learning for Justice](#)

A selection of multicultural social justice books for children, young adults, and educators.

- [Freedom Reads: Anti-Bias Book Talk Series](#)
- [Social Justice Books](#)
- [Booklists - Social Justice Books](#)

A collection of resources for educators on anti-bias teaching and social justice.

- [Teaching for Change](#)

A resource on how to adapt the curriculum for inclusive education.

- [Adapting Curriculum for Inclusion](#)

"Make the case for adaptations to the curriculum by focusing on the alignment of content with the role schools play in preparing students for their civic duties as Americans."

Social Justice Standards/Civic Literacy

Culturally relevant and sustaining educators can make the case for adaptations to the curriculum by focusing on the alignment of our content and pedagogical choices with the role schools play in preparing students for their civic duties as Americans. Especially in districts and schools that challenge any attempts to center historically marginalized groups, teachers must be strategic to use language in written and verbal communication that aligns with the civic purpose of schooling. The sites listed below provide a starting point.

- [Civics for Democracy | Learning for Justice](#)
- [Social Justice Standards | Learning for Justice](#)

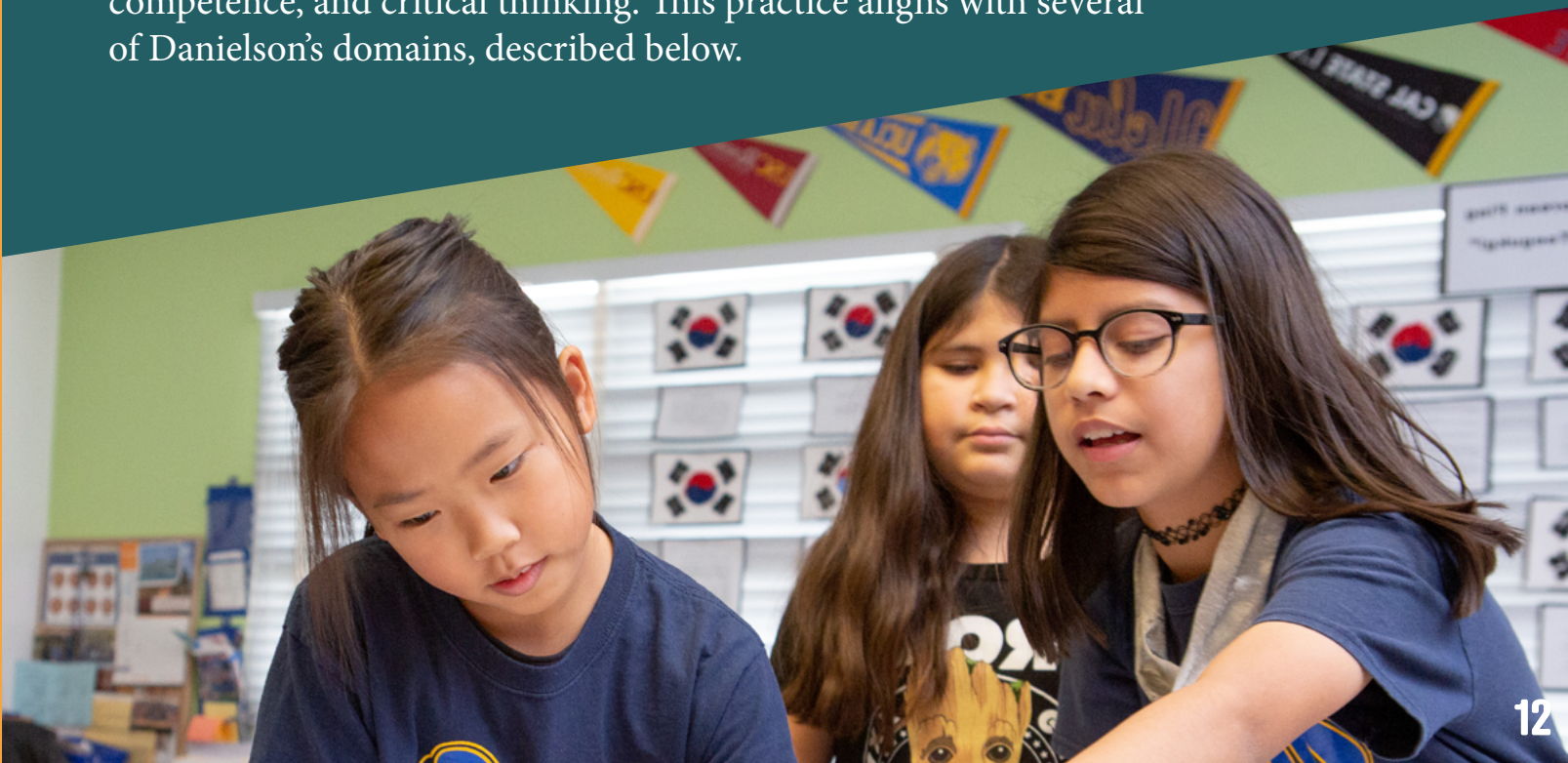


Homogeneous Classrooms

In the context of education, a homogeneous classroom is a group of students who share similar characteristics or traits. These commonalities can take many forms. For instance, students might be grouped together based on their academic ability or achievement level, such as a class composed entirely of high-achieving learners. Homogeneity can also arise when students are of the same age or grade level, speak the same language—like all native English speakers—or come from similar cultural, racial, or ethnic backgrounds. In some cases, socioeconomic status can also be a unifying factor, as can learning styles or educational classifications, such as a class made up entirely of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or a group designated as gifted learners. In today's educational landscape, race has become a particularly salient focus, as we work to address issues of equity, representation, and the impact of racial homogeneity on student outcomes and school climate.

Recognizing the limitations of homogeneous learning environments is a crucial step toward fostering more inclusive and equitable education. When students are surrounded by peers with similar backgrounds and experiences, especially when from dominant groups, they may miss opportunities to engage with diverse perspectives, challenge their assumptions, innovatively problem-solve, and develop the cultural competence needed in today's interconnected world.

Recognizing various types of differences within seemingly homogeneous learning environments can help educators encourage students to share divergent points of view, experiences, and solutions, which ultimately enhance learning, cultural competence, and critical thinking. This practice aligns with several of Danielson's domains, described below.



Description of the Challenge

Lack of Awareness – If a group of students has never encountered significant cultural diversity, they may not see the gaps in representation or understand the consequences of a one-dimensional curriculum.

- Administrators, students, or school community members may dismiss culturally relevant teaching because they perceive their environment as lacking difference. Furthermore, they may not connect divergent viewpoints and experiences with an enriching learning environment.
- Administrators, students, or school community members may see differences only along the lines of race and ethnicity. For homogenous dominant groups and homogenous non-dominant groups, expanding conceptions of difference to include other identity markers can help educators take advantage of existing differences to benefit learners.

Fear of Controversy – Introducing relevant discussions about learning differences, race, culture, and systemic inequities can provoke discomfort, particularly in communities where these topics have been historically avoided.

- In some districts, administrators and community members may have rejected topics of identity, bias, culture, or equity as relevant to curricula.

Resistance to Change – Even when presented with the benefits of culturally relevant and sustaining education, some resist because it challenges longstanding norms and educational traditions.

- School district/school board/administrators may not feel the need to address culturally relevant teaching and rethinking curricula, pedagogical strategies, and relationships with families.

Assumption of Neutrality – Some homogeneous communities may view their culture as the "default" or "neutral," making it difficult to see how educational content may be biased or exclusive.

- Students may feel that there is not a need to see and learn about other cultures.
- Students may also not express their opinions if those opinions differ from the majority. We want students to recognize different viewpoints, positions, and experiences in a classroom and that they are being prepared to be a member of a democracy and global society.



Students may not recognize the diversity that does exist within their school and community and may equate diversity with race alone.

Perceived Irrelevance & Deficit Thinking –

A homogeneous school might frame cultural relevance as something "for others," reinforcing the idea that only marginalized students need cultural awareness rather than seeing it as a universal benefit.

- If students, administrators, and school community members rarely interact with diverse groups, they may not see how cultural relevance and competence benefits them.
- If students do not see the need to understand human differences, they will struggle to develop critical thinking skills, which can lead to decreased civic engagement and civil discourse.

Limited Resources and Training – Schools in homogeneous areas may not prioritize professional development in culturally relevant education, leaving administrators and teachers without the knowledge or tools to implement inclusive practices.

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"Students may not recognize the diversity that does exist within their school and community and may equate diversity with race alone."

Connection to Danielson's Domains

Domain 1, Planning and Preparation, “Knowing and Valuing Students” 1b includes respect for students’ identities, understanding of students’ content knowledge and skills, knowledge of whole child development, and knowledge of the learning process and learning differences.

- Cultivating these understandings of students requires giving students opportunities to express who they are as individuals, how they learn, and what matters to them.

Domain 2, Learning Environments, “Cultivating Respectful and Affirming Environments” 2a includes positive relationships, a sense of belonging, cultural responsiveness, and positive conflict resolution.

- When students recognize that they can express different opinions, ask questions, challenge ideas, and work through conflict, they aren’t afraid to share differences, and they also see difference as an important part of belonging to an academic community.

Domain 3, Learning Experiences, “Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques” 3b includes critical thinking and deeper learning, reasoning and reflection, and student participation. “Engaging Students in Learning” 3c includes rich learning experiences, collaboration and teamwork, use of instructional materials and resources, and opportunities for thinking and reflection.

- Domain 3 calls on educators to encourage higher level thinking by having students consider multiple perspectives, negotiate meaning together, and recognize ambiguities and differences.
- Educators need to teach communication and have students reflect on how engaging with others’ ideas can shift our own.
- Finally, Domain 3 requires educators to use resources that reflect diverse perspectives, experiences, and ways of knowing.

Domain 4, Principled Teaching, “Contributing to School Community and Culture” 4d includes relational trust and collaborative spirit, culture of inquiry and innovation, and service to the school.

- This domain calls on educators to recognize that all people within a school community have unique identities, talents, experiences, and challenges.
- It also asks educators to keep improving schools by asking tough questions and exploring diverse answers.

Strategies to Respond to this Challenge

Build empathy through literature, case studies, and media that highlight diverse perspectives. (1b, 1d, 2a, 2b, 4c)

- Make every student feel important & heard.
- Reflect on a time when you were the “only one” of something. What was that experience like? Use this reflection to connect to students in this position.

Demonstrate relevance by connecting cultural awareness to global competency and workforce diversity. (1b, 1c, 3a, 4c)

- Broaden what diversity means and consider intersectional identities. Think beyond race/ethnicity. At the same time, recognize the experiences of students who are numerical racial/ethnic/gender/etc. minorities in the classroom.

Provide professional development that equips the community with culturally relevant strategies, even in homogenous settings. (4a, 4c, 4e, 4f)

- Engage in reflection to help educators examine their biases and assumptions.
- The homogenous classroom is still in a diverse society, so highlight the broader society that surrounds the classroom.
- Use humanizing pedagogies that emphasize all people’s rights to an education and pursuit of happiness.



Find or build curriculum that values choice and diverse perspectives. In any subject that is being taught, include diverse perspectives and people throughout every unit. This way, students see the genius of all the different perspectives in a field. (1d, 3a, 3c, 4c)

- Build in choices when possible within a curriculum.
- Use authentic or project based work that encourages diverse perspectives.
- Intentionally address differences in different lessons. Integrate multiple perspectives into different subjects.
- Generate a healthy exchange of ideas. Explicitly value openness to new ideas and changing one's mind.

Resources

Designing curriculum to embrace the fullness of the student and purpose for learning:

[Unearthing Joy: A Guide to Culturally and Historically Responsive Teaching and Learning](#) by Gholdy Muhammad

- How to integrate the five pursuits--Identity, Skills, Intellectuality, Criticality, & Joy--within every curriculum

Addressing race explicitly and encouraging diverse viewpoints:

[Not Light, But Fire](#) by Matthew Kay

- How to address race meaningfully and build conversations around difference

Encouraging diverse opinion and expression:

[Academic Conversations](#) by Jeff Zwiers and Marie Crawford

- How to teach academic conversation skills and encourage students to express different perspectives, negotiate meaning, and challenge and build on others' ideas.

Recognizing and valuing students' identities and finding difference in groups that seem homogenous:

[The Safe Zone Project](#)

- How to adopt an intersectional lens in the classroom
- [Learning for Justice Teaching at the Intersections](#)
- How to value and honor students' multiple identities

Choosing diverse texts and texts that are both mirrors/windows for students:

[Learning for Justice Guide to Choosing Diverse Texts](#)

- How to select texts that allow students to see themselves and others represented.



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